

National Infant Immunization Week
Sample Op-Ed
(568 Words)

As parents we want basic things for our children. We want them to grow up knowing that they are loved. We want to provide them with opportunities in life to reach their fullest potential. And we want them to be healthy and happy. There are many things parents want to give their children. But good health is perhaps the greatest gift. Vaccination is one of the most important ways a parent can protect their child's health.

Vaccines are one of history's most successful and cost-effective public health tools for preventing serious disease and death. Diseases that were once common-place, such as polio, measles, mumps, whooping cough, diphtheria, and rubella, are now only distant memories for most Americans. Today, there are few reminders of the suffering, disabilities, and premature deaths caused by diseases that are now preventable with vaccines.

Immunization coverage among children in the United States is the highest ever recorded for most vaccines. High immunization coverage translates into record or near record low levels of vaccine-preventable disease.

Our success also means that many parents don't understand the importance of childhood immunization and what diseases can be prevented. Most of today's parents have never seen these diseases and the suffering they can cause and, therefore, are less concerned about the need for immunization compared to other parental priorities. However, these diseases are not diseases of the past. They are still with us and circulating in many parts of the world.

We can prevent more diseases than ever before, yet despite recent gains in childhood immunization coverage, over 1 million of our nation's two year olds are still missing one or more of the recommended immunizations. Each day 11,000 babies are born who will need to be immunized against twelve diseases before age two.

Low immunization coverage is an issue that impacts the entire community. Therefore, community resources, and more importantly, community participation is essential to increasing immunization coverage. A decision to vaccinate a child is a decision to not only protect that individual child, but to protect the community as well by reducing the spread of disease to those who have not been vaccinated either by choice or because of medical reasons, such as children with leukemia.

Parents and health care providers must work together to ensure that all children are fully immunized.

Physicians need to talk with parents about the importance of immunization and be willing to answer their questions about vaccine risks and benefits. Every visit should be seen as an opportunity to vaccinate and reminders should be given to parents when immunizations are due.

Parents must also take responsibility for their child's vaccinations. They need to become informed consumers and ask questions of their health care provider. They should keep a record of each immunization visit. This is particularly important while we are experiencing shortages of some vaccines. Even if they think their child is up-to-date, they should ask their health care provider about immunizations at every visit.

CDC has a vision of a world where every child has access to safe and effective vaccines. A world where no one should suffer or die from a disease easily prevented through vaccination. That world is possible if we all work together to help immunization lead the way to healthy lives for our children.